



Written by on August 16, 2010

U.S.-South Korea Military Exercise Riles North

The latest round of joint military exercises between the United States and South Korea, made up of 86,000 troops from the two nations, began in the Yellow Sea on August 16. Voice of America News reported that much of the training will take place on computer displays as commanders practice how they would respond to North Korean nuclear, missile and submarine attacks.



The *Washington Post* reported that the 11-day drills differ from the joint naval exercises held last month in the Sea of Japan, because they are based largely on computer-simulated war games and are being held in the southern part of the peninsula.

The *Post* also noted that simultaneously with the exercises, 400,000 South Korean government employees will take part in an anti-terrorism drill that will include a simulated attack. South Korea will host the Group of 20 summit in Seoul in November, and both U.S. and South Korean intelligence agencies are prepared for a terrorist attack from North Korea.

The U.S. military Command in South Korea said in an August 16 statement that the exercise was designed to ensure that defense forces were "fully prepared to respond to any potential provocations."

Relations between the two Koreas have been even more tense than normal since the March 26 sinking of the South Korean frigate ROKS *Cheonan* by a torpedo that a team of international investigators determined to be of North Korean origin. The North Korean government has denied any involvement in the sinking, which killed 46 sailors.

Even in the best of times, tension abounds along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) a 2.5-mile-wide buffer zone along the 38th parallel between the two Koreas. Fighting between North Korea (with Soviet and Chinese backing) on one side and South Korea (with U.S. troops supporting the South and the UN overseeing the effort) ended in a ceasefire armistice, but no peace treaty. Technically, a state of war still exists between the opposing parties. The United States maintains 28,500 troops in South Korea, as a deterrent against an invasion by the North.

Considering this tense, adversarial relationship between the two Koreas, it may seem strange and premature even to think about reunification, as eventually occurred between communist East and West Germany. However, South Korea's President Lee Myung-bak, according to a report in the August 16 *Christian Science Monitor*, "faces a storm of criticism if he tries to push through a hefty 'unification tax' to help cover the immense costs of reunifying North and South Korea in the event of collapse of North Korea."

Reflecting the inevitable consequences of maintaining a centrally controlled, communist-dominated economy, North Korea is an economic disaster. An article in Wikipedia notes: "The collapse of



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communist governments around the world in 1991, particularly North Korea's principal source of support, the Soviet Union, has forced North Korean economy to realign its foreign economic relations. Economic exchanges with South Korea have even begun in earnest."

North Korea's estimated 2009 per capita gross domestic product was only \$1,900. Its balance of trade is lopsided with \$2.062 billion in exports and \$3.574 billion in imports.

In contrast, South Korea's per capita gross domestic product is \$28,000; it has annual exports of \$373.6 billion; and imports are a favorable \$317.5 billion. The nation has thriving shipbuilding and automobile production industries. While practically all residents of the North live in poverty, the South has a healthy middle class.

Even as South Korea prepares for a possible military invasion from the North, many South Koreans, including President Lee, envision the defeat of North Korea on another battleground: economic warfare. Such South Koreans apparently fail to explain how the South could absorb the devastated Northern economy without itself becoming submerged in debt. There is also the likelihood that a unified government would be politically dominated by the North and what would emerge would be yet another failed socialist state.

The *Monitor* article quoted Lee's statement that "inter-Korean relations demand a new paradigm," in which "the two sides choose coexistence instead of confrontation, progress instead of stagnation."

Lee said he would ask economic experts to determine how to levy the funds "to carry out comprehensive inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation" for "developing the North's economy dramatically" and creating "an economic community in which the two will work for economic integration."

The article also presented Lee's statements as self-contradictory, because 24 hours after issuing the above statement, he called for "training thoroughly" with the joint exercises this week involving 55,000 South Korean and 30,000 American troops.

The *Monitor* writer's conclusion: "The remarks reflect the dual outlook of a society that is prospering as never before but anxious about rising tensions in the wake of the sinking of a South Korean warship in March."

Also quoted was Choi Jin-wook, a senior analyst at the Korea Institute of National Unification, who stated: "On the one hand, we need to talk about unification. And we need also to talk about deterrence."

An article in the August 16 Korean newspaper *JoongAng Daily*, headlined "[Little enthusiasm for Lee's unification tax proposal](#)," quoted Chung Dong-young, identified as a lawmaker from the major opposition Democratic Party who was Unification Minister during the Roh Moo-hyun administration. Said Chung: "If the government does have a goal in regard to unification, it should prioritize lowering the cost of unification by resuming inter-Korean exchange, before talking about a 'unification tax.' Unification does not come on its own."

The article noted that the North has not so far shown any response to Lee's unification tax proposal, and cited analysts whose opinion is that North Korea will likely react negatively.

"North Korea has avoided mention of unification costs thus far because it could threaten a regime change," said Kim Yong-hyeon, a professor at Dongguk University.

Given the belligerent nature of North Korea, it is well that the South Koreans are not relying entirely on the prospects of "trade" with the North to get the communist leopard to change its spots. Its



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participation in military maneuvers with the United States indicate that it is wisely keeping its powder dry.

Unfortunately for economically pressed Americans, however, our government is ignoring our Constitution's requirement that U.S. dollars should be used to pay for U.S. powder, not half the world's.

Photo: The USS Blue Ridge LCC19 at anchor for Ulchi Freedom Guardian, a joint military exercise between South Korea and the U.S., in a naval port in Busan, South Korea, Aug. 16, 2010: AP Images



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